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Summary

"Stay away!" Troubling Rain puts a hand on the hilt of his sword. It doesn't matter that he's injured, he's the best swordsman his age in the whole kingdom. "Stay away or I'll kill you."

His tutors taught him about the warlocks in the forest, evil things who wield evil magic.

Notes

Written for Yuhuang Week Day 5: enemies to lovers / ~~friends to lovers~~ / avatars

See the end of the work for more [notes](#)

Troubling Rain slumps against a tree, panting. This is the worst day, so much worse than his last worst day.

He'd been so excited for his first solo hunting trip. The thought that anything might go wrong never crossed his mind because what could possibly happen? He'd trained for a whole year, waiting and waiting and *waiting* for his thirteenth birthday to come so he could go out and prove to everyone that he's the best. Right now he doesn't feel like the best. He feels like his leg is broken. He hopes his horse is okay, it isn't her fault she got spooked and threw him.

The dead leaves on the forest floor crackle when he falls on his butt. Ouch. At least there's a good-sized stick nearby. He splints the injury, ignoring the constant stabbing pain, and prepares to limp his way home.

Before he can rise, a human-shaped shadow emerges from behind a thick tree. The light filtering through the canopy of leaves is enough to illuminate the markings on the stranger's face. A warlock.

The agony in his leg fades, chased away by a rush of panic.

"Stay away!" Troubling Rain puts a hand on the hilt of his sword. It doesn't matter that he's injured, he's the best swordsman his age in the whole kingdom. "Stay away or I'll kill you."

His tutors taught him about the warlocks in the forest, evil things who wield evil magic. Don't ever let your guard down or they'll muddle your mind and make you their slave. This warlock doesn't look scary enough for evil magic—he's short and gangly and looks Troubling Rain's age—but the only good warlock is a dead warlock.

Troubling Rain would rather die than be a slave. He shouts a lot more threats and draws his sword. The blade sings as it's removed from its sheath.

The warlock backs off.

"Yeah, that's right! Run away if you know what's good for you. Run, run, run," Troubling Rain shouts.

His satisfaction is short-lived. In a mass flutter of wings, all the birds in the trees take flight. A deep, eerie silence sweeps over the forest and in its wake, a low growl fills the air. The rest of Troubling Rain's teachings come back to him. *There are beasts in the forest.*

How does his worst day keep getting worse? It isn't *fair*. Moving quickly, Troubling Rain pulls himself to his feet, ignoring the flare of pain in his injured leg. Everyone knows that even at full strength, no one person is a match for the forest beasts. He staggers as he breaks into an uneven hobble.

There's no hope of outrunning the beast but if he's going to die he's going to do it on his feet.

When he glances back to check his pursuit, the little warlock is gone. Run off to escape, just like Troubling Rain. That warlock should thank him, really, giving him a head start like that.

By some miracle, the beast doesn't catch him. He weaves through the trees as best he can, sweating and cursing each time his leg buckles, until finally the Palace Guard finds him. Normally he'd be annoyed that they were tracking him on his big day but there's no room for anything except exhaustion.

After a fortnight of annoying bed rest, he's allowed to see a Cleric and makes a full recovery. When he recounts his ordeal to his parents and tutors, he doesn't mention the strange warlock. He also doesn't mention the strange purple glow that shined far away between the fluttering leaves as he made his escape.

"Wait!" Troubling Rain shouts, pushing past the barrier of his men. "Don't kill him. Not yet."

His men part to let him through. In the middle of the circle of knights, a lone warlock is slumped face-down on the ground, his weird magic staff kicked well out of reach. It's been a long time since Troubling Rain's garrison caught a warlock in their clutches.

His mind flashes back to the day of his first failed hunt all those years ago. He'd been a kid back then, barely on the cusp of adulthood, and convinced he could do anything. It was a difficult lesson to learn he was wrong but it's one he never forgot. Just as he's never forgotten the warlock with the purple magic.

"Are we taking him alive?" Soul Speaker asks. He's the team's resident healer but he's just as deadly as the rest.

"It's Royal edict for all warlocks to be killed on sight," Bullet Rain says, with all the enthusiasm of a man who's just been given latrine duty.

Troubling Rain ignores them both, turning to Receding Tides. "Report."

Receding Tides glances at the warlock and back at Troubling Rain. "We came across him on a routine patrol. He's a good fighter, he almost had us a few times but I think he was already injured when we started fighting. We sent Flowing Cloud to get you immediately." He pauses, a distant look in his eyes.

It's a look Troubling Rain is familiar with. "What else?"

"I don't think he came to this edge of the forest to attack us. He looked far too surprised when we ambushed him, and there's very little tactical advantage of attacking the city from this location. Maybe he was lost?"

Troubling Rain ponders that. It's strange. Warlocks don't get lost in forests, that's their home. So why was this one so close to the border? "Leave us," he commands, with a wave of his hand.

"But Captain—"

"That's an order."

This time, there are no objections. His men disperse. They don't stray too far, giving him the privacy he demanded but staying close enough to lend their aid if anything goes wrong. They're good men and he's grateful to have them by his side.

He approaches the warlock cautiously, on the off chance he's faking his injuries. Troubling Rain knows all about being sneaky, he's great at it, everyone says so. But the warlock doesn't move so maybe he really is hurt. His robes are tattered, riddled with slashes that could only have come from his knights' swords, and a few scorch marks that must have come from the previous fight Receding Tides guessed at. His silver hair is dirty where it's trampled into the mud.

Troubling Rain stays out of reach. An injured warlock is arguably more dangerous than one at full health. He's seen the desperation of their kind when they're hurt and cornered, the way they lash out in the moments before they're put to death. He has no desire to allow this one to sink his claws into Troubling Rain's throat. His literal claws. At the warlock's side, his fingers taper into long, sharp-looking talons.

Carefully, Troubling Rain nudges the warlock onto his back. It's a long shot but he has to know.

His breath catches at the sight of the warlock's face. He's older but it's undoubtedly him. The same boy from before, when their roles were reversed and Troubling Rain was the one lying injured on the ground. The years have left their mark. The markings on his face are more defined, his jawline leaner, and his chest broader. Troubling Rain would recognize those features anywhere. He's been seeing that face in his dreams for half a decade. More striking than the changes is the realization that the warlock is beautiful.

Troubling Rain shakes that dangerous thought away. The teachings of his people have been drilled into him since he was a boy not yet old enough to learn his letters. Warlocks are barely people, they certainly aren't beautiful. Ice Rain is beautiful, pretty girls are beautiful, the perfect line of an attack formation is beautiful.

He takes an instinctive step back when the warlock opens his eyes.

They're the same purple as his magic, as the dimmed gem atop his staff. They widen as he scuttles backward in an ungainly flapping of robes, his hand sweeping around him like he's looking for a weapon that isn't there. Troubling Rain watches him take in the empty clearing, the circle of knights hanging far back, his staff lying out of reach. The warlock goes still, his gaze settling on Troubling Rain. He looks terrified and determined not to show it. It reminds Troubling Rain of how he felt that day in the forest, badly injured and facing an unknown enemy.

Years of training dictate that he should kill this warlock and burn the remains to dispel the lingering magic. Instead, he steps forward and asks the questions that have plagued him ever since that day. "You saved me, didn't you? That day in the forest. Why did you do it, why did you help me?"

He thinks he sees the warlock mouth, *It's you*. His bright eyes lock onto Ice Rain in its sheath.

"Why'd you do it?" Troubling Rain asks again. "I'm asking you a question that means you give me an answer."

At the time, he'd been too young and arrogant to put the pieces together, but as he grew, so did his suspicions. He should have been torn apart that day but the beast never found him, even though he was too injured to move in silence. The purple light flashing through the trees that day hadn't been a coincidence. It was the warlock, leading the beast away from Troubling Rain.

Here on the forest floor, the warlock composes himself and keeps his silence. If he's still scared, he doesn't show it. It's fine though. Troubling Rain knows his theories of that day are correct. This warlock saved his life.

He can't repay that with death. He won't. Slowly, he nods. "Fine, then."

The warlock's hand twitches, a wisp of purple magic swirling around his fingers. With a soft hiss, it dissolves into nothing. The defiant look fades into angry acceptance, even as his eyes never leave Troubling Rain. Not even when Troubling Rain crosses the empty field to retrieve the discarded staff.

In clumsy, halted movements, the warlock climbs to his feet.

Troubling Rain grins, pleased. Anyone willing to meet danger on their feet is someone he likes. "You're strange for a warlock. Don't you know it's dangerous to come this close to the city walls?"

For the first time, the warlock looks surprised. Troubling Rain counts it as a victory.

"People say I'm strange too because I talk a lot. *I* don't think it's strange though." Troubling Rain holds out the staff. When nothing happens, he wrinkles his nose. "Well, are you going to take it, or not? I don't have all day, you know, I'm very busy and important."

The warlock blinks like he's trying to work out where the trap is. When he moves, it's nearly too fast to see, his body agile like liquid fire, even injured. In the blink of an eye, the weapon is snatched away. The warlock holds it tight to his body, like he thinks Troubling Rain might change his mind and snatch it back. Which is so weird, more weird stuff from a weird warlock. He wouldn't give a weapon back just to take it away. He kills when it's necessary but he isn't cruel.

The gem on top of the staff pulses and flares into light.

Troubling Rain hopes he hasn't just done something really stupid but his sense of honor won't let him do anything else. He has to repay his debt from that day. It's a good thing Captain Fang isn't here to see this. His old Master at Arms would put him on cleaning duty for a whole year if he knew what kind of risks Troubling Rain was taking with an enemy warlock.

Instinctively, his hand twitches towards his sword and he curses himself for being an idiot when the warlock snaps into a defensive stance. Deliberately, Troubling Rain sets his hands down at his sides. What's one more dumb thing on top of a mountain of bad decisions, right? "Hey, hey, it's okay. No one has to die today. You saved me that day, I'm not going to hurt you."

The silence stretches. Why won't that guy say anything? Are all warlocks this quiet? Maybe he doesn't know how to talk? Or doesn't know the language? No, that's not right. The warlock definitely understood him when he was asking all those questions. He's just choosing not to talk, which Troubling Rain can't understand. Doesn't he have anything to say? How can he just stand there and stare?

Troubling Rain is about to give up on getting a reaction when the warlock bows and slowly backs away.

"Hey, hey, wait. Aren't you going to tell me your name?" It earns him a slight tilt of the head, and Troubling Rain huffs. What a weird warlock. "Mine's Troubling Rain. You better remember it."

The warlock doesn't stop his careful retreat but he does speak, *finally*. "I will."

His voice lingers long after the warlock himself has disappeared into the trees. It's a nice voice, smooth and sweet like honey. Troubling Rain is left standing by himself, wondering if he should take the parting words as a threat. He shrugs it off, skipping over to his knights. He'll need to ensure none of them blab about the warlock they should have captured but he's not worried. All his men are good and loyal, they won't betray him.

At the edge of the forest, he stops and looks back. "I'll see you again," he promises.

Troubling Rain hates cages.

He grips the metal bars and shouts a million different curses, but like all the previous times, no one comes to see what all the noise is about. He'd pace around and plan his escape, but there isn't enough room to stand, let alone walk. If only they hadn't taken his sword. Ice Rain can cut through anything.

The growl of his stomach is loud in the empty dungeon, almost as annoying as his swollen and dry tongue. He isn't far gone enough to lick the filthy water from the stone floor, but it's looking better and better. He only hopes his men all got away. They'll sound the alarm and his people will come for him.

He has urgent information to bring back, information worth getting captured for.

A burst of light explodes across the dark room, searing into his eyes that have grown too accustomed to pitch blackness. His hearing is as sharp as ever, though, and he catches the rusty squeak of the cage door opening behind his closed eyelids. He braces himself for a fight. Fighting blind isn't his favorite thing to do but if his enemy is expecting easy prey, they're in for a surprise.

"Relax. If I wanted you dead, you would be dead."

And *wait, wait, wait*, it's been over a year but he knows that voice. Troubling Rain nearly falls out of his crouch onto his ass in surprise.

Sure enough, when his vision adjusts, it's the warlock standing in front of him. He looks a lot scarier than he did the last time they met, magic cracking at his hands and his hair billowing out around him, despite the dank, stale air in the dungeon.

Troubling Rain braces himself for whatever revenge the warlock has come seeking. The debt between them is clear, which means they're enemies once more. Which is too bad because Troubling Rain is so curious about him, such a strange warlock who maybe helps poor trapped swordsmen out of cages. Is that what's happening here? He has so many questions, and they only multiply when no deadly magic strikes him.

The warlock ducks down and offers his hand. Troubling Rain crawls out of the cage and lets himself be pulled to his feet. His back hurts and his knees are stiff but he's fought in worse conditions. And now, apparently, he has a partner for his jailbreak. They work surprisingly well together, adjusting quickly to each other's attack patterns.

Together, he and the warlock fight their way free of the dungeon's guards until they're the only ones left standing.

Troubling Rain runs outside into the sunshine, grateful to feel the warmth on his face after so many days of captivity. He turns to the warlock, the rush of battle still racing in his blood. "We make a good team, don't you think. That was so cool what you did with the magic." He raises his arms to demonstrate, like he's summoning up that glowy hexagon magic prison the warlock pulled out of nowhere. He even got his sword back in the ensuing scuffle, which is great. He loves his sword, it's the best.

He bounces around the warlock, still talking. "You made it look so easy but it was so strong, I bet it was hard to learn, wasn't it." Troubling Rain would know. He makes his swordwork look easy, but it's not. It took him his whole life to learn.

When he looks over at the warlock, he expects the usual annoyed face everyone makes when he talks too much, but to his surprise, the warlock is listening.

"Are you gonna give me your name this time?" Troubling Rain calls after him, when they go their separate ways. He isn't hoping for much but that's never stopped him talking before.

A pause, and then, "Swoksaar."

By the time Troubling Rain figures out the warlock actually gave him his name and not some scary curse in an obscure warlock language, Swoksaar is long gone.

It's only rumor and speculation but Troubling Rain follows the whispers, dread churning in his stomach. *Rare exotic pet. Incredibly dangerous magic. Auction at the Green Rose Inn.* He sneaks and he threatens and he bribes until he comes to a secret back room of a seemingly typical inn. The door isn't locked, and all the hair on his arms stands straight up.

Inside, a figure with long silver hair is slumped on the floor, unmoving.

Troubling Rain rushes over, but no amount of shaking Swoksaar or yelling in his ear is able to rouse him. "How am I supposed to pay you back for rescuing me if you don't wake up. Wake up, wake up, wake up," he demands.

Swoksaar doesn't wake up. A glint of sickly green metal gleams at his neck, and Troubling Rain doesn't know anything about magic, but he's pretty sure Swoksaar isn't the type to wear such an ugly looking necklace. Swoksaar is pretty and he wears pretty clothes. Even his weapon is pretty. The thing on his neck is so painfully ugly it makes Troubling Rain's skin crawl.

He unsheathes his sword and breaks the chain, careful not to slice delicate skin. He steps back, unsure of what to expect, readying himself for a fight.

Nothing fancy happens, no sparks or magic or guards rushing in to attack them.

Swoksaar slowly stirs to life, bracing himself against the floor and struggling to sit upright. Troubling Rain helps, and nearly stumbles backward at the rage flaring in Swoksaar's eyes when he's touched. It's quickly replaced by recognition, followed by a tired smile and a soft word of thanks.

Troubling Rain guards the door while the last of the necklace's effects fade.

Later that night, before they part once more, they watch from the shadows together as the inn is consumed in purple flame.

The bridge cracks beneath Troubling Rain's feet, plunging him into ice cold water.

Every muscle in his body freezes up. His armor is the perfect weight for a fight but it's deadly in the water, weighing him down and dragging him deeper beneath the surface. He can't move and he can't breathe. All he can do is sink. No amount of kicking and struggling

is enough, not after the fight he just had. He's too tired and the water is too cold. The light above him dims the further down he goes.

His chest burns with the need to breathe.

It almost isn't a surprise when the arms wrap tight around his body from behind. The world goes blurry and when he can think again, he's laying by the river bank drenched, with an equally soaked warlock sprawled out beside him. Troubling Rain gulps in air until he gets his breath back. He's shivering so hard his teeth clack together.

Swoksaar leans over him, the lines of his face tense. "Are you okay?"

"I am now. How many times have you saved me, now?"

"I've stopped counting." The little smile Swoksaar gives him says in no uncertain terms that Swoksaar has *not* stopped counting, and has in fact just updated his tally.

Troubling Rain gives him the same shit-eating grin right back. "Good. Because I stopped counting how many times I've saved *you*."

Above them, the sun is shining. It's a beautiful day to be alive. Troubling Rain soon finds out that there's no magic warlock spell for drying clothes or people, just like there's no spell to pluck a man from the torrent of a raging river. They do it the old fashioned way, building a fire and sitting pressed together in front of the flames.

If it wasn't for the markings on Swoksaar's face, Troubling Rain could mistake him for human like this. And when they shed their inner clothes, he certainly feels like any other man Troubling Rain has touched. The old teachings of his childhood float to the forefront of his mind and he mentally throws them in the fire.

He wakes up alone but the fire still burns, keeping him safe and warm. Woven into the flame is a hint of purple.

The view from the cliffs is beautiful, the setting sun painting everything beneath it in swaths of gold. Even Swoksaar's hair is haloed by golden light.

His back is to Troubling Rain, so there's no way to see if his skin is equally brushed but Troubling Rain imagines it too glows in the orange light. He watches from behind a large boulder, tracing the strong lines of Swoksaar's back with his eyes. He knows the feel of him under his hands and yet they keep going their separate ways, back to their respective homes.

The edge of the sun melts into the horizon.

It seems silly to keep his distance after everything they've done. Troubling Rain steps out from his hiding place and approaches.

“You’ve been following me,” Swoksaar says, not bothering to turn his head, though he takes a step closer so their shoulders brush together.

“Don’t pretend you didn’t notice until now. Besides, it’s not like you’re one to talk. *You’ve* been following *me*.”

“I’ve been rescuing you. There’s a difference.”

Troubling Rain sticks his tongue out, and does a little celebration in his head when the lines around Swoksaar’s eyes crinkle with a faint smile. Ha, Troubling Rain *knew* he was looking at him from the corner of his eye. “Oh, is that what we’re calling it? Fine, in that case, yes, I ‘follow’ you a lot. All the time. How does such a strong warlock like you get into so much trouble?”

“It’s a natural talent. It’s a good thing I have you to ‘follow’ me.”

The words bring back old memories and unanswered questions. “You never told me why you saved me that first time.” Troubling Rain has always wanted to know, but stopped asking after he didn’t get an answer. Once Swoksaar became his friend, it didn’t seem right to push for answers he wasn’t willing to give

Swoksaar’s shoulders sag as he lets out a breath. “You’re still curious, aren’t you?”

Troubling Rain bounces on his heels, sensing victory. “Yes, yes, yes, are you finally going to tell me, this is so great.” He pokes Swoksaar’s cheek where the barest hint of a blush flushes his skin. “Is this going to be embarrassing for you? I didn’t think anything could make a big scary warlock embarrassed.”

Swoksaar bats his hand away. “A little, but you deserve to know.” He gathers himself. “It wasn’t an accident we met that day. I had seen you riding with a group of people—your tutors, I assumed—several weeks earlier.” He smiles, helplessly. “Perhaps it’s more accurate to say, I heard you. Your voice carried on the wind far before I heard the horses. I was curious that a person could talk so much about so many things. So when I saw you leave the city walls alone that day, I followed you. And it’s a good thing I did.”

The memory of how close he’d come that day makes Troubling Rain shiver. And that’s when it hits him. “Wait, wait, wait, you were following me that day because you liked that I talked a lot? That’s the best thing I ever heard. Were you also following my men that time they captured you? Is that why you were so close to the edge of the forest that day? We could never figure it out.”

He knows he’s right by the grimace on Swoksaar’s face. “Yes. I recognized them. I was young and reckless and thought they might lead me to you.” The blush on his face deepens. “Your men were more skilled than I anticipated.”

Troubling Rain puffs his chest out. “That’s because I trained them myself.” He leans against Swoksaar’s shoulder. “So you’re saying we’re both alive today because you had a childhood crush on me.”

“That is *not* what I said.” Swoksaar glares at him but can't hide his fondness. "But it's not entirely inaccurate, either. Time has proven that we're both stronger when we're together." His shoulder goes tense where they're pressed together. When he speaks again, he picks his way carefully through his words. “I've traveled alone my whole life. I think I'm tired of it.”

Swoksaar brushes their hands together. The planes of his face are painted in liquid gold, as beautiful as the day he stood dirty and battered in that clearing surrounded by knights. Troubling Rain's heart pounds when he twines their fingers together.

They've come so far in the years since that day in the clearing, and the one that came before it when they were both kids. Those meetings had planted the first seeds of doubt in Troubling Rain's mind about the ways of his people, and it's only bloomed brighter since then. Even now, he should be returning home but he doesn't know if he's ready.

Especially not now, hand-in-hand with a warlock who's supposed to be his enemy.

Perhaps one day he'll return and change things. Or maybe he'll return and convince the people he loves to steal away with him and start anew. He looks at the world spread out before him, wide and limitless, and thinks that anything is possible.

“Everyone says I'm really annoying, you should know that. So much talking, on and on about nothing. You might get sick of me,” Troubling Rain tells him.

Swoksaar squeezes his hand.

They stand together until the fire of the sunset gives way to a purple that could rival Swoksaar's magic in its majesty, and then finally to darkness. Warmth bleeds into the chill of night. The end of a day giving way so the next can rise.

When they leave the cliffs, they leave together.

End Notes

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